So the term firstborn must be understood correctly in that it carries with it a religious, priestly and spiritual significance in the eyes of God and does not imply that there was a second born, third born … etc. Even St. Cyril of Alexandria states this…

" …her firstborn does not mean the first among several brethren, but one who was both her first and only son"

— Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke

3. What about the verse which says "He knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son" Matthew 1:25. Wouldn't that imply that St. Mary had an intimate marital relationship with St. Joseph after the Birth of Christ?

Let us examine the word till. It comes from the Greek word "eos" which is translated till, but does not carry with it a reference to time, as it does in the English language. For example, I may say, I did not go to the supermarket until it stopped raining. So what this means is that I waited until after it stopped raining and went to the supermarket. However this is not the case with the word "eos" which is translated "till". Let us look at how this word "eos" is used elsewhere in the Holy Bible.

"And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child until "eos" her death".   2 Sam 6:23

Does this mean that she had a child after her death? Of course not!!! So again, the word "eos" which is translated "till" or "until" does not carry any reference to time.

Therefore, St. Joseph did not " know" St. Mary after the birth of the Lord. It is worthy to note that the evangelist writes this verse only to indicate clearly and without any doubt that St. Joseph had nothing to do with the conception of the Lord.

4. What about the obvious references to the "Brothers" of the Lord? (Mt 12:46, Mk 3:31, Lk 8:19, Jn 2:12)?

Let us examine some verses to help us understand the true meaning of the word "brother".

"So he [Abraham] brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot…" Gen 14:16

The word used to describe the relationship between Lot and Abraham is brother. However, in reality they were not brothers; Lot was Abraham's nephew! (Gen 11:27)

" Then he [Boaz] said to …Naomi who … sold the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech... " Ruth 4:3
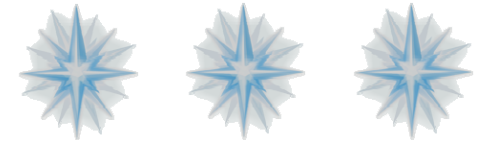
Again the word used to describe the relationship between Boaz and Elimelech is "brother". However they were not brothers, but just relatives (Ruth 3:2). So we must remember that in the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek tradition, there is no specific word to distinguish family relationships as we have in the English language. Therefore, the word "brother" is used to indicate an unspecified family relation such as a brother, a relative, a cousin or a nephew.

If there did indeed exist any brothers of the Lord, why would the Lord have given the care of His mother to St. John at the foot of the Cross? (Jn 19:26). And if we believe that God took flesh from the Virgin's womb, why would it be difficult for some to imagine that the womb would remain virgin forever? Why would Christ share the womb from which he came if he did not share the tomb in which His body laid (Lk 23:53), or the donkey on which he entered into Jerusalem (Lk 19:30). Also, if He does not share His heavenly throne, why would He share His earthly throne, which is the womb of the Ever-Virgin St. Mary with anyone else? Let us say with all confidence and reverence… **"Hail to the Ever-Virgin St. Mary, the Theotokos."**

ST. MINA'S COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH OF HOLMDEL NJ

THE EVER-VIRGINITY OF ST. MARY

The **Ever-Virginity** of St. Mary

A Bible believing Christian will not disagree that the Lord Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary and that the birth of the Lord was a result of the work of the Holy Spirit and not any human father (Lk 1:35). However, many will disagree that St. Mary remained a Virgin after the birth of the Lord. They say that St. Mary married St. Joseph the Carpenter and gave birth to the "brothers" of the Lord. But is this true? And is this what has been believed from the beginning? If not, what can we say to prove the Ever Virginity of St. Mary? Let us look at the Holy Bible and examine the issue more closely.

Let us consider the following questions and objections.

1. What does the Word Ever-Virgin mean?

When we say the word Ever-Virgin, we mean to say that even after the birth of the Lord St. Mary, the Mother of God, remained a virgin her entire life, up until the day of her repose and that she did not have any intimate marital relations ever. We see this even in the iconography and hymnology of the Church.

In the familiar icon of St. Mary, we see her depicted carrying the Lord in her arms. If you look closely you will see that there are 3 star-like symbols on her clothing, one on each shoulder and one on her head. This is to be understood that she was virgin before, during and after the birth of the

Lord. In the sacred hymnology of the Church, in the paramone response of the Acts, we proclaim and say " The Mother of God, Mary the Ever-Virgin." We also say in the Watos Aspasmos Hymn, which is chanted on the Feast of the Nativity, that "The Begotten of the Father, before all ages, was born of the queen and her virginity is sealed". Sealed meaning never broken or violated, even after the birth of our Lord.

St. Justin the Martyr and other Fathers of the Church have taught the Ever-Virginity of St. Mary and they based their teaching on a typological interpretation of the words of Ezekiel the prophet...

" And the Lord said to me, this gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut"

—Ezekiel 44:2

They teach that the gate symbolizes St. Mary; the gate that the Lord God of Israel passed through which no one else ever passed through.

St. Augustine says that St. Mary is … …

"...a Virgin [while] conceiving, a Virgin [while] pregnant. A Virgin [while] giving birth. A Virgin Perpetual. Why do you wonder at this?

—Sermon 186:1 (411 AD)

He even goes so far as to call those who deny the Ever Virginity of St. Mary heretics!!!

"Heretics called the antidicomarites are those who contradict the perpetual virginity of St. Mary and affirm that after Christ was born, she was joined as one with her husband" *— Heresies 56 (428 AD)*

Also St. Jerome wrote a treatise called "The Perpetual Virginity of Blessed Mary" in which he refutes the claims of a man called Helvidius who believed that St. Mary had other children. He says in his treatise…

" I must call upon the Holy Spirit to express… and defend the Virginity of the Blessed Mary. I must

call upon the Lord Jesus Christ to guard the sacred lodging in which HE abode… I must also entreat God the Father to show that the mother of His Son...continued [to be] a virgin after HE was born." —NPNF-2-06 The Perpetual Virginity of Blessed Mary . St. Jerome 383AD

2. What about the reference to Christ as the "Firstborn son"? Doesn't that imply that St. Mary had other children? (Mt 1:25, Luke 2:7)

As a general rule, whenever we are presented with any verses or confusing words, we must try to understand the proper meaning and usage of the word in the Holy Bible and interpret them in the light of the teachings of the Holy Fathers of the Church. The sayings of the Fathers of the Church are important to refer to because of what was written in 2 Peter 1:20-21 which says…

"...knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" *—2 Peter 1:20-21*

The Lord was called Firstborn because the firstborn was considered the Priest of the family. So also Christ is our "Great high Priest" (Heb 4:14). Also, in the time of the Patriarchs of the Old Testament (Abraham, Isaac, Joseph etc), there was no official priesthood, therefore the Priestly duties were done by the head of the family- the father. Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all built altars and offered sacrifices and they passed those priestly duties to their firstborn sons. So to say that Christ is Firstborn is to say HE is a priest.

Also, Christ being firstborn means that He belongs to God; He is God's Son. Any firstborn belonged to God, as we see in the following verse.

" I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast. They shall be Mine…" *—Numbers 3:13*